

Message Text

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C O N F I D E N T I A L MOSCOW 10458

E.O. 11652: GDS

TAGS: PINT, SCUL, UR

SUBJECT: THE UNOFFICIAL ART SCENE

1. SUMMARY: SOVIET UNOFFICIAL ARTISTS, BECOMING MORE CONFIDENT OF THEIR POSITION IN SOCIETY, ARE HOPING TO ARRANGE EXHIBITS THIS FALL IN MOSCOW AND LENINGRAD. THEY ARE NOW USING DETENE AND CSCE AS ARGUMENTS IN DISCUSSIONS WITH THE AUTHORITIES. END SUMMARY.

2. SOME PROMINENT MOSCOW AND LENINGRAD UNOFFICIAL ARTISTS COMMENTED RECENTLY ON AN APPARENT EASING IN THE ATTITUDE OF THE AUTHORITIES. ACCORDING TO OUR SOURCES, IT NOW SEEMS LIKELY THAT THERE WILL BE MAJOR UNOFFICIAL ART EXHIBITS THIS FALL IN BOTH LENINGRAD AND MOSCOW. NEGOTIATIONS ARE QUITE FAR ADVANCED FOR A LENINGRAD EXHIBIT, PROBABLY IN SEPTEMBER OR OCTOBER. SOME 30 TO 50 UNOFFICIAL ARTISTS WOULD EXHIBIT. OUR SOURCES SUGGEST THAT NO AGREEMENT YET EXISTS ON WHERE THE EXHIBIT WILL BE HELD; THEY ADD, THOUGH, THAT THE LENINGRAD CULTURAL AUTHORITIES HAVE INDICATED THAT IF ANY EXHIBIT IS PERMITTED, IT WILL BE IN CIRCUMSTANCES ALLOWING FOR EASY PUBLIC ACCESS AND WITH GOOD EXHIBITING FACILITIES.

3. THERE IS MOVEMENT IN MOSCOW AS WELL. A SERIES OF MEETINGS HAVE BEEN HELD BETWEEN REPRESENTATIVES OF MOSCOW'S

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UNOFFICIAL ARTISTS, THE MOSCOW CITY SOVIET AND LOCAL

CULTURAL AUTHORITIES. NEITHER DATE NOR PLACE HAS YET BEEN AGREED, BUT OUR SOURCES SAY THAT THE AUTHORITIES HAVE TENTATIVELY ACCEPTED THE PRINCIPLE OF A LARGE-SCALE EXHIBIT -- UP TO 150 ARTISTS -- SOMETIME THIS FALL. THE ARTISTS ARE HOLDING OUT FOR A BIG GALLERY IN CENTRAL MOSCOW (THEY REALIZE THAT THEY CAN NOT GET MANEGE),# BUT WOULD BE PREPARED TO ACCEPT A LARGE HALL IN SOKOLNIKI PARK.

4. THE MOSCOW EXHIBIT WOULD BE LARGER IN SCOPE THAN THE LENINGRAD ONE; IT IS NOT AS YET CLEAR THAT IT WILL BE HELD. OUR SOURCES ARE, HOWEVER, FAIRLY SURE ABOUT THE LENINGRAD EXHIBIT, WHICH THEY SEE AS LESS IMPORTANT BOTH BECAUSE OF THE HIGHER QUALITY OF WORK DONE IN MOSCOW, AND BECAUSE OF THE INCOMPARABLY LARGER IMPACT THE WORK WOULD HAVE BOTH IN THE SOVIET UNION AND, THANKS TO WESTERN CORRESPONDENTS, IN THE WEST.

5. OUR SOURCES PROFESS TO SEE THE UNOFFICIAL ART WORLD AS MAKING PROGRESS IN ITS DRIVE FOR ACCEPTABILITY, OR AT LEAST GREATER TOLERATION. DURING A CONVERSATION WITH VISITING AMERICAN ARTIST JAMES WYETH, SEVERAL LEADING UNOFFICIAL ARTISTS BROUGHT UP THE POSSIBILITY OF AN EXHIBIT IN THE USSR BETWEEN SOVIET UNOFFICIAL ARTISTS AND SUCH MAJOR AMERICAN FIGURES AS WYETH, RAUSCHENBERG AND INE. THE SOVIET ARTISTS DID NOT REALLY EXPECT SUCH AN EXHIBIT TO TAKE PLACE, ALTHOUGH THEY DID NOT DISMISS THIS OUT OF HAND. WHAT IS REVEALING IS THEIR STATED MOTIVE FOR PROMOTING IT. THEY SUGGEST THAT THE MINISTRY OF CULTURE AND THE UNION OF ARTISTS, FACED WITH A SERIOUS AMERICAN DESIRE TO EXHIBIT IN THE USSR, MIGHT THEN ACCEPT TO SPONSOR SUCH AN EXHIBIT OFFICIALLY. THIS WOULD, OF COURSE, MEAN THAT THE UNOFFICIAL ARTISTS WOULD NOT PARTICIPATE. FOR THE LATTER, HOWEVER, THEIR PARTICIPATION WOULD BE SECONDARY. IT IS THE VERY FACT OF A POSSIBLE EXHIBIT IN THE SOVIET UNION BY MAJOR AMERICAN CONTEMPORARY ARTISTS THAT OUR SOURCES SEE AS IMPORTANT, BOTH IN ITSELF AND ALSO AS HELPING THEIR OWN ATTEMPTS TO CONVINCE SOVIET CULTURAL AUTHORITIES THAT SOVIET UNOFFICIAL ART SHOULD NO LONGER BE CONSIDERED AS AT BEST MARGINAL IN SOVIET SOCIETY.

6. THE SOURCES STATE THAT DETENTE, WITH ITS MANIFESTATIONS OF SUMMIT VISITS, AS WELL AS CSCE, AND JOINT SOVIET-AMERICAN

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SCIENTIFIC EXPERIMENTS GIVES THEM THE POSSIBILITY OF TURNING AGAINST THE AUTHORITIES SOME OF THEIR OWN ARGUMENTS. THE EXHIBIT IN THE BEEKEEPING PAVILION WAS A FIRST STEP AND SHOULD THE MOSCOW AND LENINGRAD EXHIBITS COME OFF, THIS WILL MARK AN ADDITIONAL AND IMPORTANT STEP TOWARD ACCEPTABILITY. SOME OF THE ARTISTS SUGGESTED THAT THE APPROACH OF THE 25TH PARTY CONGRESS WILL MEAN THE BRAKES GOING ON AS PARTY AND STATE BUREAUCRATS BECOME LESS WILLING TO TAKE RISKY POSITIONS.

ANOTHER ARTIST, HOWEVER, MADE THE POINT THAT UNCERTAINTIES IN THE PRE-CONGRSS PERIOD COULD MAKE IT POSSIBLE FOR THE UNOFFICIAL EXHIBITS TO SLIP THROUGH WITHOUT TOOM UCH HIGH-LEVEL PARTY DISCUSSION.

7. COMMENT: WE FEEL THAT THE ARTISTS ARE OVERSTATING THE EXTENT OF THEIR LIKELY SUCCESS. WHILE BOTH EXHIBITS COULD COME OFF, IT WOULD BE LESS SURPRISING IF NEITHER TOOK PLACE. THE EXHIBIT WITH AMERICAN ARTISTS SEEMS TOTALLY UNLIKELY TO TAKE PLACE (WE OFFERED NO ENCOURAGEMENT). WHAT WE FIND NOTEWORTHY, HOWEVER, IS THE ATTITUDE EXPRESSED BY THE ARTISTS. CERTAINLY THEIR WILLINGNESS TO TRY TO ARRANGE EXHIBITS IN THE PRE-CONGRESS PERIOD, THEIR APPARENT DETERMINATION TO USE THE AUTHORITIES' ARGUMENTS AGAINST THEM, THEIR WILLINGNESS TO USE DETENTE AS A LEVER TO SEEK CONCESSIONS -- ALL THIS INDICATES A GROWING DEGREE OF CONFIEENCE IN THEIR POSITION IN SOCIETY AS COMPARED WITH PREVIOUS YEARS.
STOESSEL

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